

IN TOUCH

When You are the Caregiver

Family caregivers assist another person—spouse, family member, friend, or partner—in managing a chronic illness or disability. They share a common bond of self-sacrifice that is hard to comprehend if you have not walked in their shoes. If you are new to caregiving, follow the advice of experienced caregivers. Learn to manage stress, identify your needs, and take care of yourself. Get exercise, watch out for signs of depression, take breaks, and get enough sleep. Reach out to other caregivers for support. Your EAP can assist you in locating nearby resources or a support network, or you may contact the following resources:

Alzheimer's Association: 800.272.3900; www.alz.org. Supports families and caregivers of patients with AD with almost 300 local chapters providing support groups and information.

Children of Aging Parents: 800.227.7294; www.caps4caregivers.org. Information and materials for adult children caring for their older parents.

Eldercare Locator: 800.677.1116; www.eldercare.gov. Nationwide, directory assistance service helping older people/caregivers locate local support and resources.

Family Caregiver Alliance: 415.434.3388; www.caregiver.org. Community-based nonprofit organization offering support services for caregivers of adults with AD, stroke, traumatic brain injuries, and other cognitive disorders.

The National Institute on Aging Information Center: 800.222.2225; www.nia.nih.gov. Offers a variety of information about health and aging, including the *Age Page* series (also available on the web site) and the NIA Exercise Kit, which contains an 80-page exercise guide and 48-minute closed-captioned video.

Well Spouse Foundation: 800.838.0879; www.wellspouse.org. Nonprofit membership organization supporting wives, husbands, and partners of the chronically ill and/or disabled.

Unleash Creativity

New research from Stanford Business School shows how to be more creative. ***Get out more!*** Millions of dollars in resources at your fingertips won't predict creative thought better than the degree to which you have diverse social interaction in your life. Your creative juices are more likely to flow by interacting with family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and complete strangers. Diversity seems to improve the ability to reject convention and experiment with creative thought and become innovative. The message: Ties that bind, may bind creativity!

Stanford Business School, Stanford, CA



Helping people lead healthier lives

Coping with a Crisis

Life includes occasional crises. No one escapes them, but many avoid their worst effects on physical or mental health. A crisis is a major stressful event with the ability to significantly alter your life. Unfortunately, crises don't come with instruction manuals. But there are a few survival tips worth knowing, and with them, you can improve your chances of adapting to the new circumstances crises bring.

- **Open up.** Don't make a crisis a do-it-yourself experience. Reach out and communicate with others who can support you. Acknowledge the difficult impact. Share the emotional load to reduce the punch of a crisis. The EAP can be an ideal partner in helping manage a crisis.
- **Manage feelings.** Crises can produce guilt, resentment, anger, fear, and other powerful feelings you were unprepared to face. Avoid making a crisis worse by punishing yourself for what you feel. Share these feelings with those who care about you.
- **Sort it out.** Discover what part of a crisis can be managed or changed. Work toward identifying and accepting that which cannot be changed.
- **Take charge.** Feeling better and coping successfully with a crisis requires your participation. Without denying the importance of the crisis, decide that you will prevent your life from growing worse because of it.
- **Take action.** Take steps that will improve the way you feel in the face of what a crisis brings. Small steps count. Act to make your life happier or better, knowing that by not coping with a crisis in this way, you risk going in the opposite direction and growing in unhappiness.

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Change is Certain

Can you adapt? If the only thing certain in life is change, then the next most certain thing must be resistance to change. Change is difficult because it often threatens something we value or a need we have grown accustomed to being met. If you are facing changes at work, you will have a better chance of accepting and adapting to change if you can identify what needs or values are threatened, and then figure out how to get that same need met when changes come. This could be something beyond your awareness. Consider these needs: feeling in control, security, prestige, self-esteem, closeness, relationships, freedom, comfort, status and recognition, independence, and creativity.

Affirmation Action

Affirmations are positive assertions for self-improvement or achieving personal goals. They work by helping you “achieve or become what you think.” They are powerful tools. Tips:

- 1) Give up all negative self-talk that interferes with the affirmation.
- 2) Repeat the affirmation to yourself as often as possible during the day.
- 3) Write the affirmation daily in a journal as many times as possible.
- 4) Place the affirmation where you can see it often.
- 5) Record the affirmation and listen to it on a tape while you commute.

The bottom line: Repeatedly focusing on thoughts and words in support of the affirmation speeds its realization.

Mental Illness in the Family

Each year millions of Americans are diagnosed with mental illness. Family members commonly feel an overwhelming sense of helplessness and may secretly blame themselves, believing something they did caused the family member's mental illness. Since family members are often key to intervention, helping them cope is crucial to helping those with mental illness.

- ***Avoid the trap of shame and isolation.*** Reach out for support and a listening ear. Avoid the trap of overprotecting your family member from the stigma of mental illness. That stigma is fast disappearing, and new medications for mental disorders are continually being researched.
- ***Be hopeful and realistic.*** With the aid of proper medication and support, many people with mental illness and multiple hospitalizations are capable of living full, responsible lives.
- ***Don't ignore the needs of children.*** Although mental illness should not be the focal point in your family, share information with them suitable to their age level that can reduce their fear and anxiety.
- ***Understand patient responsibility in recovery.*** A key principal in mental health treatment is patients taking personal responsibility for managing their illness. This includes medication compliance.
- ***Take care of yourself!*** Maintain balance in your own life. Family members often suffer from lack of sleep, nutrition, exercise, fun, and stress management. Self-help resources can help you draw a balance between concern and detachment. Your EAP can help you find a balance that works for you.
- ***Learn about the illness.*** Learn about the type of mental illness that affects your family member. Know its relapse warning signs so you can act early if intervention is necessary.

Using Your EAP

Question: My day care provider comes to my house late so I can't leave for work on time. My supervisor has known this for two years. Today, he referred me to the EAP after we argued about my coming to work late. Is the referral retaliation?

Answer: Although the referral followed your argument, it can't be retaliation. There is nothing revengeful or punitive about an EAP referral. In fact, it is the opposite—a supportive attempt to help you and possibly avoid an adverse action to stop your tardiness. Apparently your supervisor has tried to be lenient with your situation, but can't continue. You naturally feel upset after such a long period of accommodation. Your EAP can help you examine possible strategies for resolving the day care issue and your arrival time.

Question: I'm separated from my husband and anticipate we will soon divorce. Can the EAP help me sort out my feelings and the decisions I need to make?

Answer: Yes, your EAP can help. As anyone who has experienced it could tell you, the stress associated with the break-up of a marital relationship comes in stages. Most divorced individuals report that their greatest level of stress occurred while considering divorce; the second most distressing period was when the decision was made to divorce; and the least stressful time was after the separation or divorce. Although employees often seek help for marital problems, fewer consider the EAP to manage the stress of divorce. The earlier you call your EAP, the more likely you are to reduce the effects of the divorce on your health and productivity. Your EAP can help with depression, sleep issues, childcare concerns, financial and legal concerns, finding support, and more.

Are You Young & Reckless?

A younger worker is 80 percent more likely to be injured on the job, and that injury is more likely to come in the first six months of employment. This is a key message in the latest report from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA). Many developmental factors contribute to the risk young workers face. Younger workers may reduce their risk by considering these tips:

- 1) Deal effectively with personal issues and conflicts that can cause distraction on the job and an increased risk of injury—home and parent issues, socializing, that new car, etc. Remember the EAP as a source of help for confidential problem solving.
- 2) Use safety equipment and avoid shortcuts. Young workers have a natural sense of invincibility. This is normal, but can lead to taking risks.
- 3) Whenever possible, participate in company training and safety workshops on using equipment or machinery.
- 4) If in doubt about how to perform a task or handle a piece of equipment, ask. Unwillingness to ask questions can place you and others at risk of injury.

Research shows that EAPs reduce the rate of accidents in the workplace because when employees solve tough personal problems, they often reduce many risks. These include unsafe attitudes that can adversely affect health and safety decisions. Do you have an employee with a personal problem that contributes to risk of injury? Talk with him or her about contacting their EAP. Here's a summary of the most violated OSHA standards for 2003, any of which could be influenced by a personal problem:

- 1) Taking risks with electricity.
- 2) Not wearing hard hats in construction sites.
- 3) Ignoring safety precautions necessary to prevent falls.
- 4) Failure to participate in a training program on hazardous substances.
- 5) Ignoring fire safety practices.

To speak with an EAP professional,
please call:

800.765.0770